

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

A Quick Reference

It is often difficult to have a productive meeting because few individuals know the groundrules for effective meetings or have the necessary skills to achieve success. Productive and effective meetings enhance the chance of creating a successful project. As team members often have the expectation of learning new ways of working together, follow these guidelines from the start of any project.

The Ground Rules for Effective Meetings

- A strong frame means a strong house... Use a detailed agenda that has been developed prior to the meeting and has been sent to participants in advance (*Don't forget to include – topics, presenters, time guidelines, item types, a warm-up exercise, review, breaks and a meeting evaluation*).
- Keep focused and moving... Use a dedicated and experienced facilitator who will keep the discussion on topic, intervene if the discussion becomes fragmented, encourage equality of communication, and bring the discussion to a timely close.
- Record keeping is the backbone of success... Use a dedicated scribe to record key subjects, main points raised, decisions made and items that the group will discuss in the future.

Meeting Types

Meetings have different objectives. So the strategies used to meet these objectives vary, including selection of participants and agenda development. Meetings are for:

- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Reporting and presenting information
- Planning
- Reacting and evaluating
- Any combination of the above

Before the Meeting

- Do your homework... Determine the meeting's purpose and type;
- Time is critical... Establish the objectives and develop an agenda, limiting these items to work that can reasonably be completed within one hour or less.
- Who... Identify the appropriate participants.
- What and Why... Provide participants with agenda materials and instructions for the meeting.
- Where and How... Confirm the meeting logistics, including room setup and equipment needs.

During the Meeting

- Remember the "100 Mile" Rule... Prior to the meeting, remind participants that no one should leave the meeting unless this would occur even if the meeting was 100 miles from the workplace, to turn off cell phones, pagers and other electronic communication devices;
- Structure is essential... Follow the agenda.
- Time is of the essence... Make sure your time limits are clear, beginning and ending the meeting on time.
- Be flexible... Recognize new issues as they arise and agree on the most appropriate method with which to deal with them.
- Participation is empowering... Encourage each member to participate.
- Focus, focus, focus... Intervene when discussions go off point or are redundant;
- Ensure consensus... Summarize each agenda item as it is completed to ensure understanding and consensus. Close the meeting with a summary of each decision and agreement.
- Who and what... Establish and assign action items.
- What's next... Determine whether a follow-up meeting is desirable and, if so, set a tentative time, date and agenda.
- The past is the key to the future... Objectively review the meeting and evaluate its successfulness, recording improvements suggested by team members and helpful feedback for the the facilitator.

After the Meeting

- What happened... Prepare and distribute minutes or meeting summary.
- Act... Implement the decisions of the meeting.
- Plan... Follow-up on any meetings or other activities decided upon during the meeting.